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MUSIC AND MOVEMENT: FROM PIANO TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Abstract:

The central problem of music performance teaching is how to develop a student's ability to feel emotional contents of music and to pass these musical emotions during his performance. Essentially, these issues are related to the development of musical talent, in which the musical empathy plays a leading role. Recent studies show a close interrelation of emotions and movements in the music performance art, while in the understanding of music an important role belongs to modeling processes (embodied simulation), the bodily transmission of music. It is clear that this approach is particularly promising for music pedagogy, and first of all for pedagogy of music performance. This view will help the beginning performer to find the most efficient way for a better understanding of musical emotion within the content of the musical piece, and, moreover, will contribute to the development of expressive technical skills. In this article we will study the embodied perspective in piano teaching, as well as the system of teaching methods, based on the motor modeling of musical rhythm.

Keywords:

piano teaching, emotions, expressivity, embodied simulation, music performance, musical rhythm.

Introduction

The main task of piano performance teaching is to develop the student's ability of subtle perception of emotional content of music and the transmission of this content through their performance. Essentially, these issues are related to the development of musical talent, in which the musical empathy plays a leading role.

The masterliness of the pianist in the broadest sense can be considered as one of the manifestations of the general human expressiveness: externalizing of emotions through the expressive movements. This is a process of incarnation during performance of the experienced by the Pianist feelings, encoded in a musical composition. This process can be represented in the form:

Figure 1



Source: Own Picture

For a long time the major role in music science and music pedagogy was played by the entirely theoretic and rational approach which based on the priority of knowledge, analysis and logical thinking in comprehension of music. This approach conformed to the concepts accepted in epistemology at that time. Unlike other more rational areas of knowledge where conceptual thinking prevails, in music this approach showed itself as ineffective and insufficient: the issues of emotions which are of major importance to the content of music, perception and performance, were simply ignored or only considered in terms of semantic musicological analysis as the meaning of a particular sign of music language. As for research in music pedagogy and performance, it only confirmed the importance of emotions in the perception and performance of music. But the comprehension of the emotional content of music performed was again limited to the means of conceptual thinking, to verbal characteristics based on theoretical analysis using rational cognition.

This situation in the study of musical emotions can be still observed in Russia. But recently in the world science new interesting surveys appeared, dedicated to the study of musical emotions during performance (Van Zijl, A. G. W., & Sloboda, J. A. 2011; Bhatar, A., Tirovolas, A. K., Duan, L. M., Levy, B., & Levitin, D. J., 2011, January 24). However, most of these works focus on the study of the perception by the audience of

the emotions transmitted by the artist, that is, the stages 3 and 4 in Figure 1. But for the musical pedagogy, for piano teaching, it is very important to study the stages 2 and 3, that is, the formation of the performer's emotions and their expression during the performance.

New perspectives in the study of this problem can be found in regards of the new theories of knowledge, namely in connection with the concept of embodied cognition, which received recently a great acknowledgment and popularity (Shapiro, L. A., 2011). The neurophysiological basis of this concept is the mirror neuron theory developed by Rizzolatti and his followers. According to this theory, simulation of movements serves as the basis for mechanisms of recognition of other's intentions and emotions (Rizzolatti G., Craighero L., 2004; Iacoboni, M., 2003). Music Perception as Embodied Cognition has become a subject of a recent study made by Korean researchers (Wooyong Y., Dongnyeok J., Jun-dong C., 2014).

These and similar surveys give a new impetus to the musical pedagogy, in particular, when treating the question of the development of the Performer's emotions. It is obvious, that these issues are directly related to understanding and reproduction of musical rhythm which is associated with motor sensations.

The problem of formation and development of the sense of rhythm in students is perhaps one of the most intractable for piano pedagogy. According to the felicitous remark of B. Asafiev, the musical rhythm is "easy to feel but difficult to define." (Asafiev B.V., 1971). A.B. Goldenveyzer, a great skeptic in matters of the rhythm sense development, believed that in this respect, we have to accept the sense of rhythm given to the student by nature. "There is nothing we can use to measure the length of sounds except for our own sense of rhythm", he wrote. – "... But if you feel that the player sustains a whole note longer than needed, try to prove him that you are right and he is not!" (Tsypin, G.M., 1984; p. 81).

But it is worth noticing that such a skeptical attitude to the problem of rhythm development have occurred particularly in piano pedagogy whereas in the field of general music education in the early 20th century E. Jaques-Dalcroze proved that the sense of rhythm is possible not only to develop but it can also serve as the foundation for both music and general education of a person (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1967).

Why in piano teaching this problem is so acute, and, on the contrary, in the method of Jacques Dalcroze this is no problem?

The answer is obvious: because Jacques Dalcroze method is based entirely on the principles that today would call "embodied cognition". It is built on the use in a musical understanding of the various forms of movement, including the speaking, which are also one of the movement variants. This brilliant idea was found by a talented musician and teacher intuitively, not "thanks to" but "in spite of" theoretical views accepted at that time.

Also in piano pedagogy, we can observe similar cases, when effective ways of working have been found intuitively. But they are not widely used because they were not well grounded in theory, and many teachers did not trust them. We assign to use these techniques in teaching various forms of movements which are not directly related to the production of sounds, but help students to understand better the structure and emotional sense of musical rhythm.

This is, firstly, the movement of the body or its parts (hands, feet), and, secondly, the movement of the vocal apparatus (counting aloud, the pronunciation of syllables or words of similar rhythm). In conclusion let us note that these movements are essentially some forms of embodied simulation and embodied cognition in their most clear and obvious manifestation.

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